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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 002102

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/25/2017
TAGS: [AADP](#) [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: ROBUST OBSERVATION MISSION REQUIRED FOR OCTOBER
LOCAL ELECTIONS

REF: BOGOTA 1390

Classified By: CDA Milton K. Drucker
Reasons: 1.4 (b,d)

Summary

¶1. (C) On March 20, Foreign Minister Fernando Araujo formally requested an OAS electoral mission to observe the October local elections. The request reflects concerns--heightened by recent revelations of paramilitary interference in the 2002 and 2006 legislative elections--that former paramilitary groups and leftist terrorists will try to influence the results through fraud and coercion. Political parties and the key GOC electoral official agree such a mission should be larger than the typical OAS mission and stay on the ground longer. The GOC is also seeking advance support to monitor the critical voter registration process culminating in May. We welcome the prospect of an expanded OAS mission, which would complement GOC and civil society efforts to address electoral concerns, especially in rural or conflict areas. End summary.

GOC Request OAS Assistance for October Elections

¶2. (C) Foreign Minister Araujo formally requested an OAS observation mission for Colombia's October local elections during his March 20 meeting with OAS SYG Insulza. Vice Foreign Minister Camilo Reyes and Secretary in the Presidency Bernardo Moreno also separately told us the GOC would welcome such assistance, but did not discuss the details of the size or scope of the mission. National Election Registrar Juan Carlos Galindo--responsible for the integrity of the elections--told us he would be traveling to Washington the week of March 26 to meet with OAS SYG Insulza to reiterate the GOC's request to the OAS. Galindo said the 45 international monitors (15 from OAS) on the ground for the 2006 elections were not nearly enough. He will request at least 150 for October--on the ground in Colombia for at least a month, if possible, to reinforce the GOC's efforts.

Galindo told us the close of voter registration rolls (May 1-21) will be an especially critical period. He would welcome any international support available between now and election day. Galindo said he is taking actions to combat fraud, including randomly transferring local registrars (reftel).

Growing Consensus for Enhanced Election Observation

13. (C) Recent revelations of paramilitary interference in the 2002 and 2006 congressional elections have created popular concern about Colombia's electoral process. U Party President Carlos Garcia, Liberal Party President Cesar Gaviria, and POLO President Carlos Gaviria--along with numerous civil society leaders--tell us a robust international election monitoring effort will help to address any doubts about the results. All support an OAS observation mission. They say it needs to be larger than previous OAS efforts and to be on the ground for at least a month prior to the elections. Threats to a free and fair process come from former paramilitaries and leftist terrorist groups. Rural Security Police General Antonio Gomez Mendez told us new criminal groups (including some led by former paramilitary leader Vicente Castano) plan to interfere in the October elections through violence, intimidation and corruption. As in the past, the FARC, and to a lesser extent the ELN, will also attempt to influence key races, mostly in the southern half of the country. The FARC is also expected to attempt to use violence to suppress voter turnout in areas where their ability to determine the results is limited.

International Community Supports Monitoring Efforts

14. (U) The international community recognizes potential fraud and violence concerns, and is discussing efforts to assist the GOC in its election preparation and monitoring plans. On March 20, Swedish Ambassador Lena Nordstrom hosted officials from interested G-24 embassies to discuss the October elections. All acknowledged the threats posed by illegal armed groups, as well as the need to support the GOC's and local civil society's efforts to protect the integrity of the October elections. Swedish, Dutch, Norwegian, Swiss, British, and EU officials stressed the importance of financial and other support to the local NGO "Electoral Observation Mission (MOE)," support/training to university and media groups, and aid to civil society groups working on an elections risk map. UNDP representative Bruno Moro said his organization was preparing election reform proposals and would work through the G-24 to secure resources. All agreed on the importance of local and national media in promoting public debate of key policy issues and in exposing armed groups' efforts to influence the results through fraud or violence. Participants agreed to coordinate their efforts to support the electoral process.

USAID Programs in Place for October

15. (U) USAID is considering several activities to promote electoral transparency in October, including a human rights violation/election risk mapping program, domestic observation, and voter education. The National Democratic Institute (NDI) will conduct Party poll-watcher training for up to 20,000 people in prioritized regions. USAID will also provide USD 300,000 to MOE to provide monitoring in the vulnerable Choco, Cesar, Magdalena, Guajira, and Norte de Santander Departments, and will also provide security training (and possibly equipment) to at-risk political leaders in critical regions. We will work with our international partners to identify areas for further cooperation and reinforcement. Linking international and domestic efforts will be crucial.

Comment

[¶6.](#) (C) We agree international observation would strengthen GOC and extensive local civil society efforts to address concerns regarding the October local elections, especially in rural areas. The Department should support a robust OAS mission, including the presence of smaller OAS teams to begin the monitoring process as soon as possible. This would lay the foundation for a larger OAS mission that would arrive closer to the poll date. Any enhanced election observation mission will carry a substantial cost, but we understand the OAS has funds available for this purpose. End comment.
Drucker